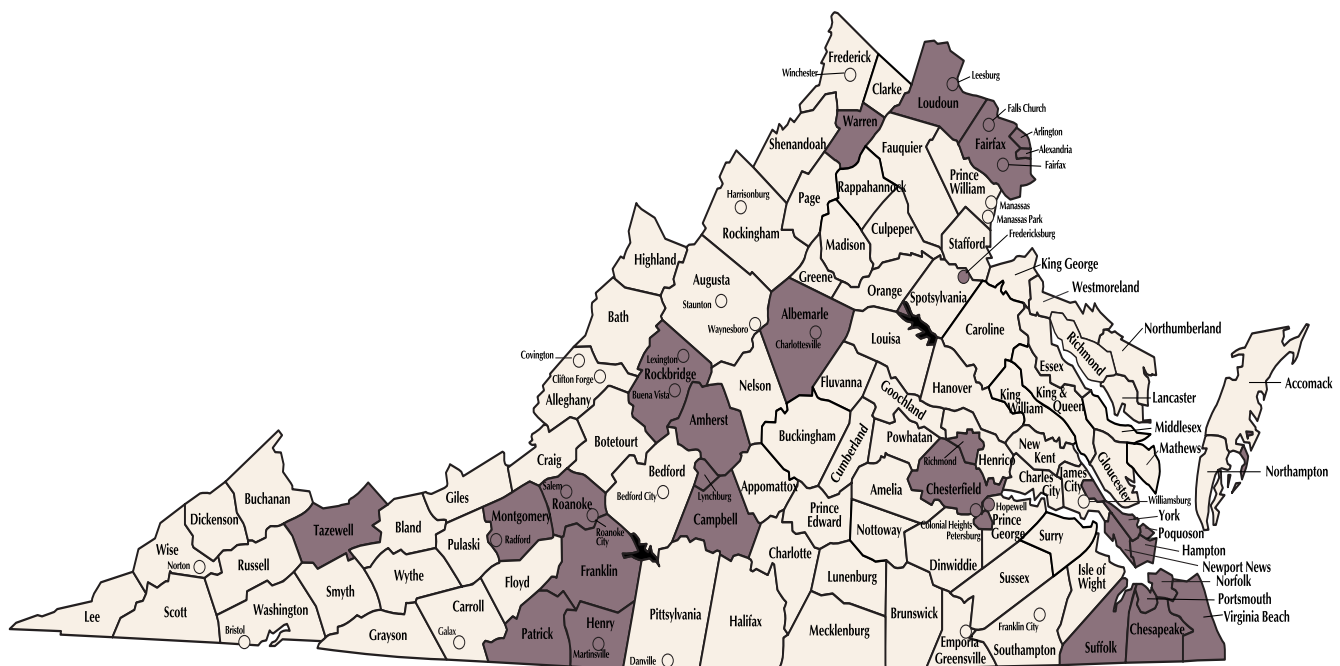
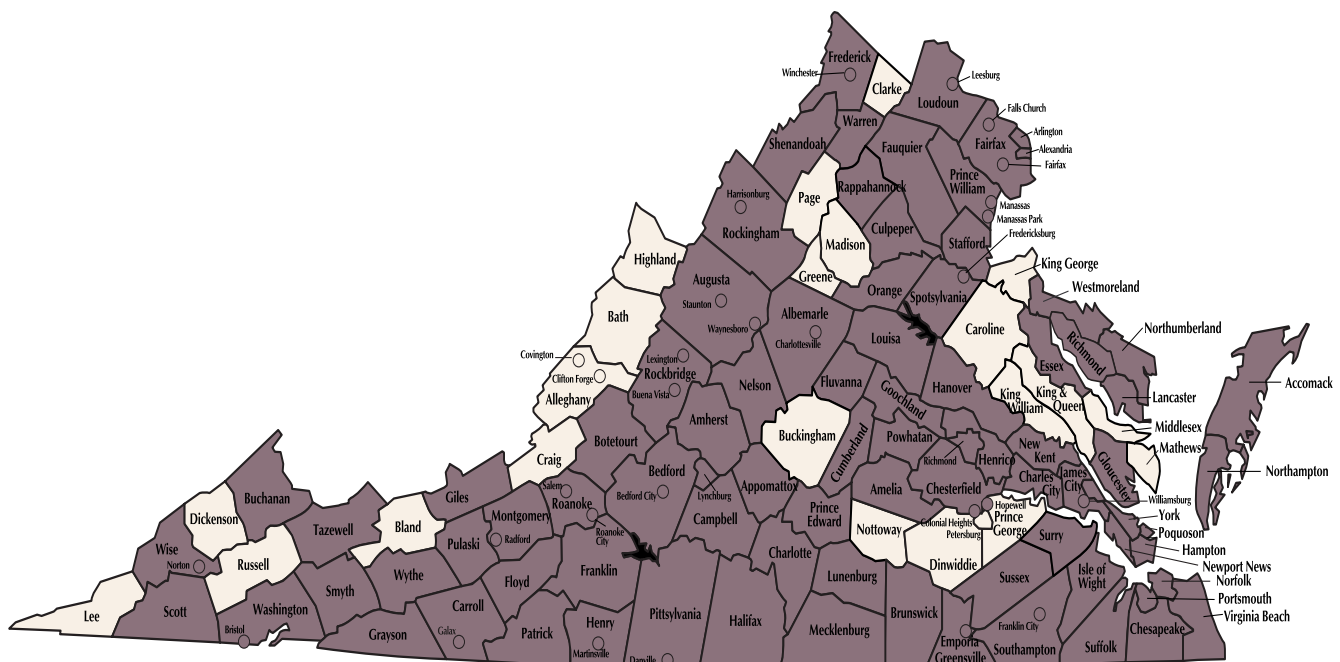


Display 26A: Virginia Localities with Victim-Witness Programs (FY 1988)



Data Source: Victims Services Section, Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services.

Display 26B: Virginia Localities with Victim-Witness Programs (FY 1998)



Data Source: Victims Services Section, Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services.

Display 26: Crime Victims' Rights and Services in Virginia

Virginia's criminal justice system contains elaborate safeguards to protect the rights of persons accused of crimes. However, only in recent years has the system begun to incorporate major safeguards for victims of crime. This display describes some of Virginia's efforts to help victims cope with the trauma of victimization and to ensure their rights within the criminal justice system.

■ During the mid-1970s, and since 1984, Virginia's Department of Criminal Justice Services has grant-funded local victim/witness programs. These programs provide crime victims and witnesses with counseling and referrals, help victims file for compensation, and supply information about the investigation and prosecution of cases. This display illustrates the growth in the number of local victim/witness programs between FY 1988 and FY 1998. In FY 1988, there were 32 victim/witness programs operating in Virginia. By FY 1998, this number had increased to 94 programs, which serve about 95% of Virginia's population.

■ Most local victim/witness programs are based in Commonwealth's Attorneys' offices, with some based in law enforcement agencies or private-nonprofit organizations.

■ In 1995, the Virginia General Assembly passed the Crime Victim and Witness Rights Act. This Act is designed to ensure that crime victims receive certain information and services and have a meaningful role in the criminal justice process.

■ The Crime Victim and Witness Rights Act built upon existing law to ensure that victims and witnesses of crime have opportunities to make the courts aware of the full impact of crime; are treated with dignity, respect and sensitivity; and that their privacy is protected. The Act also is intended to ensure that they are informed of their rights; receive authorized services; and are heard at all critical stages of case processing.

■ The Code of Virginia defines a victim as a person who has suffered physical, psychological or economic harm as a direct result of the commission of any felony offense or of certain misdemeanor offenses.

Victims also include spouses and children of all victims, and parents and guardians of minor victims, mentally or physically incapacitated victims and victims of homicide. Parents, children, spouses or legal guardians who commit criminal offenses against a victim are specifically excluded from the definition.

■ To fund victim/witness programs and implement the Crime Victim and Witness Rights Act, Virginia also established in 1995 the Virginia Crime Victim/Witness Fund. The Fund supports local victim/witness programs through a three-dollar charge collected from convicted offenders.

■ Services provided by local victim-witness programs include collecting court-ordered restitution and monitoring restitution, and assisting victims with filing claims and receiving victims' compensation awards. In FY 1998, local programs collected more than \$591,000 and monitored restitution of \$6.7 million. Programs assisted victims filing victims' compensation and awards totaling more than \$1.1 million.

■ During FY 1998, victim/witness programs in Virginia provided services to more than 34,500 individuals. Almost two-thirds of those receiving services were females, and most were between the ages of 18 and 44. About one-third of victims receiving services were victims of domestic violence.

■ By law, witnesses to crimes may be entitled to protection, address and telephone number confidentiality, a separate waiting area during court proceedings and assistance with obtaining protection, intercession services with employers and interpreter services.

■ Virginia also provides services to crime victims through grant funding to local V-STOP (Services, Training, Officers, Prosecution) programs. The V-STOP program develops and strengthens law enforcement and prosecution strategies and victims services to promote the apprehension, prosecution and adjudication of persons committing violent crimes against women. Also, in October, 1999, the Department of Criminal Justice Services began administering grants

to support statewide and local sexual assault programs that provide direct services to victims of sexual assault in Virginia.

■ In November, 1996, Virginia voters by 84% approved an amendment to the Constitution of Virginia to accord certain rights to victims of crime. The amendment requires that in criminal prosecutions, the victim shall be accorded fairness, dignity and respect by officers, employees and agents of the Commonwealth and its political subdivisions and officers of the courts. The amendment also states that the General Assembly may define and provide by law other rights to victims.

■ Virginia is now one of 32 states to amend its constitution to recognize and protect victims' rights. Currently there is an effort underway to add a victims' rights amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

***The Commonwealth
recognizes and provides
rights to victims of crime
through the 1995 Crime
Victim and Witness Rights Act,
and in 1996 Virginia voters
approved an amendment to
the Constitution of Virginia
recognizing the rights
of crime victims.***
